Giving (dāna), is extolled in the Pali Canon as a great virtue. It is the beginning of the path to liberation. When the Buddha preaches to a newcomer, he starts with an exposition on the virtues of giving (dānakathā). Giving appears first in both the 10 meritorious deeds (puññakiriyavatthu) and the 10 perfections (pāramitā).

**Function of Giving**

* Giving is of prime importance in the Buddhist scheme of mental purification because it is the best weapon against greed (lobha), the first of the three unwholesome roots (akusalamūla).
* Greed is wrapped up with egoism and selfishness, since we hold our personalities and our possessions as “I” and “mine”. Giving helps make egoism thaw.

**Qualities of the Donor**

* He is a man with faith (saddhā), he has faith in the nobility of a morally sound life, in the teachings of kamma, and in the Triple Gem.
* He is not merely a giver (dāyako), he is a lordly giver (dānapati). The commentary explains the concept of ‘lordly giver’ as follows:-

*“He who himself enjoys delicious things but gives to others what is not delicious is a donor who is a slave to the gifts he gives.  
 He who gives things of the same quality as he himself enjoys is one who is like a friend of the gift.*

*He who satisfies himself with whatever he can get but gives delicacies to others is a lordly giver, a senior and a master of the gifts given.”*

* He keeps an open house for the needy (anāvaţadvāro). He is like a wellspring for recluses, the destitute, wanderers and beggars.
* He is munificent (muttacāgo) and is interested in sharing his blessings with others (dānasaṁvibhāgarato).
* He is a philanthropist who understands the difficulties of the poor (vadaññū).
* He is open-handed and is ready to comply with another’s request (payatapāņí).
* He is one fit to be asked from (yācayogo).
* He takes delight in distributing gifts to the needy (vossaggarato) and has a heart bent on giving (cāgaparibhāvitacitto).
* A noble giver is one who is happy before, during and after giving. Before giving he is happy anticipating the opportunity to exercise his generosity. While giving he is happy that he is making another happy by fulfilling a need. After giving he is satisfied that he has done a good deed

**The Donations**

* Practically anything useful can be given as a gift.
* The Niddesa gives a list of fourteen items that are fit to be given for charity:-

1. Robes
2. Alms-food
3. Dwelling places
4. Medicine and other requisites for the sick
5. Food
6. Drinks
7. Clothes
8. Vehicles
9. Garlands
10. Perfume
11. Unguent
12. Beds
13. Houses
14. Lamps

* It is not necessary to have much to practice generosity, for one can give according to one’s means.
* Gifts given from one’s meager resources are considered very valuable. Alms given from wealth righteously earned are greatly praised by the Buddha. Even if one gives a small amount with a heart full of faith one can gain happiness hereafter.

**The Donee**

* Alms should be given to:-

1. Guests, travellers and the sick should be treated with hospitality and due consideration.
2. During famines the needy should be liberally entertained.
3. The virtuous should be first entertained with the first fruits of fresh crops.
4. The recluses (samaņa) and brahmins (brāhmaņa) are religious persons who do not earn wages. They give spiritual guidance to the laity and the laity is expected to support them.
5. The destitutes (kapaņa) and beggars (yācaka) need the help of the rich to survive and the rich become spiritually richer by helping the poor.
6. When transport facilities were meagre and amenities for wayfarers (addhika) and wanderers (vaņibbaka) were not adequately organised, the public have to step in to help.

* In Anguttara Nikāya (A.IV,44) the Buddha describes three types of fires that should be tended with care and honour:-

1. *Âhuneyyaggi* – One’s parents.
2. *Gahapataggi* – One’s wife and children, employees and dependents.
3. *Dakkhiņeyyaggi* – Religious persons who have either attained the goal of Arahantships or have embarked on a course of training for the elimination of negative mental traits.

**The Motivation for Giving**

* Anguttara Nikāya (A.IV,236) enumerates eight motives:-

1. *Âsajja dānaṁ deti* – One gives with annoyance, or as a way of offending the recipient, or with the idea of insulting him.
2. *Bhayā dānaṁ deti* – One gives out of fear.
3. *Adāsi me ti dānaṁ deti* – One gives in return for a favour done to oneself in the past.
4. *Dassati me ti dānaṁ deti* – One gives with the hope of getting a similar favour for oneself in the future.
5. *Sādhu dānan ti dānaṁ deti* – One gives because giving is considered good.
6. *Ahaṁ pacāmi, ime ne pacanti, na arahāmi pacanto apacantānaṁ adātun ti dānaṁ deti* – “I cook, they do not cook. It is not proper for me who cook not to give to those who do not cook.” Some give urged by such altruistic motives.
7. Imaṁ me dānaṁ dadato kalyāņo kittisaddo abhuggacchantí ti dānaṁ deti – Some give alms to gain a good reputation.
8. Cittālankāra-cittaparikkhāratthaṁ dānaṁ deti – Others give alms to adore and beautify the mind.

* Favouritism (chanda), ill will (dosa) and delusion (moha) are also listed as motives for giving. Sometimes alms are given for the sake of maintaining a long-standing family tradition. Desire to be reborn in heaven after death is another dominant motive. Giving pleases some and they give with the idea of winning a happy frame of mind.
* The sutta (A.IV.62) further maintained that alms should be given neither with any expectations (na sāpekho dānaṁ deti) , nor attachment to the recipient.
* If one gives with the idea of accumulating things for later use that is an inferior act of giving. If one gives with the hope of enjoying the result thereof after death that is also an inferior act of giving.
* The only valid motive for giving should be to adore the mind, to rid the mind of the ugliness of greed and selfishness.

**The Manner of Giving**

* The attitude of the donor in the act of giving makes a world of difference for the good-will between the donor and recipient irrespective of whether the gift given is big or small.
* Anguttara Nikāya (A.III,172) emphasize on the manner of giving:-

1. *Sakkaccaṁ dānaṁ deti* – Alms should be given in such a way that the donee does not feel humiliated, belittled or hurt. The needy ask for something with a sense of embarrassment, and it is the dirty of the donor not to make him feel more embarrassed.
2. *Cittikatvā dānaṁ deti* – Alms should be given with due consideration and respect. The recipient should be made to feel welcome. It is when a gift is given with such warmth that a cohesive mutually enriching friendliness emerges between the donor and donee.
3. *Sahatthā deti* – One should give with one’s own hand. The personal involvement in the act of giving is greatly beneficial. Society is welded in unity with care and concern for one another when generosity is exercised with a warm sense of personal involvement.
4. *Na apaviddhaṁ deti* – One should not give as alms what is only fit to be thrown away. One should be careful to give only what is useful and appropriate.
5. *Na anāgamanadiţţhiko deti* – One should not give in such a callous manner so as to make the donee not feel like coming again.
6. *Saddhāya deti* – Giving with faith especially when offering alms to the clergy one should do so with due deference and respect, taking delight in the opportunity one has got to serve them.
7. *Kālena deti* –Give at the proper time to meet a dire need. Such timely gifts are most valuable as they relieve the anxiety and stress of the supplicant.
8. *Anuggahacitto dānaṁ deti* – One should give with altruistic concern, with the sole intention of helping another in difficulty.
9. *Attānañ ca parañ ca anupahacca dānaṁ deti* – In the act of giving one should take care not to hurt oneself or another.
10. Viceyyadānaṁ sugatappasat-thaṁ - Giving with understanding and discretion is praised by the Buddha.

**Benefits of Giving**

* Anguttara Nikāya (A.IV,79; A.III,41) enumerates a number of benefits of giving:-

1. The generous person wins the sympathy of others.
2. Arahants approach him, accept alms and preach to him first.
3. A good reputation spreads about him.
4. He can attend any assembly with confidence and dignity.
5. He is reborn in a state of happiness after death.
6. A generous person wins popularity.
7. Almsgiver bestows on others life, beauty, happiness, strength and intelligence. Having bestowed them on others, he becomes a beneficiary of them himself.
8. By giving alms with due deference, he gains children, wife, subordinates and servants who are obedient, dutiful and understanding.
9. By giving alms at the proper time not only does one obtain great wealth but also timely fulfillment of needs.
10. By giving alms with the genuine desire to help others, he gains great wealth and the inclination to enjoy the best of sense pleasures.
11. By giving alms without hurting oneself and others, one gains security from dangers such as fire, floods, thieves and unloved heirs.

**References**

**1) The Practice of Giving by Lily de Silva (Edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi)**